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What Did Shadrin Take with Him in from the Cold?

Washington.

ONE of the most mysterious spy stories circulating around here is that of Nikolai Shadrin, the Soviet naval officer who defected to the

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United States in 1959 and evaporated in Vienna nearly three years ago.

The general assumption is that Shadrin, who had become a double agent, was abducted by the Russians after they learned he was operating for the Central Intelligence Agency while pretending to work for the KGB, the Soviet secret service.

That assumption prompted President Ford to query Leonid Brezhnev, the Soviet Communist party leader, for information on Shadrin, and Henry Kissinger, when secretary of state, also raised the case with Andrei Gromyko, the Russian foreign minister. Both Mr. Ford and Mr. Kissinger drew blanks.

But sources familiar with the affair now submit that Shadrin was really a Communist agent all along, and though some senior CIA officials had good reason to suspect him, others insisted on pushing through his clearance because he served their own purposes.

As these sources tell it, warnings about Shadrin were issued on at least two separate occasions by the CIA's counterintelligence section, which had interrogated him intensively. But the warnings were either ignored or overruled by the agency's Soviet Bloc department, which desperately needed data and thus wanted to believe that Shadrin could be trusted.

These disclosures suggest that elements inside the CIA are often so anxious to score points that they are willing to court security risks. That the CIA has frequently suffered from an excess of zeal has also been seen in its eagerness to engage in assassination plots and other dubious ventures.

This thesis is disputed by other informants with intimate CIA connections. They assert that Shadrin would never have been cleared by the agency had there been misgivings about him. In their estimation, Shadrin was a genuine defector who was overexposed by the CIA and ended up being trapped by the Russians.

Substantiation for this thesis is contained in the report the other day that Shadrin had been reluctant to accept the double agent assignment, but was persuaded by the CIA to take it in order to bolster the position of a real KGB operative who sought to work secretly on behalf of the United States.

Whatever the truth in all this, it is clear that the Shadrin business is still a focus of enormous controversy, and is likely to remain so until harder evidence is forthcoming—which may be never. In the absence of such evidence, I think it is worthwhile to present a new version of the story, even though it cannot be entirely validated.

Shadrin, whose name was originally Nikolai F. Artamonov, fled from Poland to Sweden in June, 1959, accompanied by a young Polish woman who later became his wife. They were flown by the CIA to West Germany, and were grilled at length by Russian-speaking agency interrogators.

Sources here recall that Shadrin failed the lie-detector tests given him at the time. As a result, counterintelligence specialists expressed doubts about his credibility and even cautioned that he might be a Soviet "plant."

Nevertheless, he was transferred to Washington and not long afterward put to work in the Office of Naval Intelligence as an evaluator of Soviet naval data.

But doubts persisted and in 1964, the sources recollect, Shadrin was again subjected to interrogations and lie-detector tests. Again it was concluded that he was untrustworthy.

Once again, though, that judgment was rejected. Shadrin not only continued at his post, but was soon shifted to the Defense Intelligence Agency, where he translated Russian military literature.

It was in the summer of 1966 that Shadrin became a double agent. The standard version of his metamorphosis is that he was contacted by the KGB with an offer to spy for Moscow, reported the approach to the Federal Bureau of Investigation, and was told to play the game. Sources who have monitored him for years, however, have a different account.

They say the KGB, which was really employing Shadrin, was then beginning to worry about his safety. Therefore, the KGB devised the "double agent" ruse with two motives in mind.

First, by volunteering to deceive the KGB by covertly serving U. S. intelligence, Shadrin would restore the faith that his CIA mentors had initially placed in him.

Moreover, by revealing the KGB offer to the FBI, which would henceforth make him its protege, he was reinforcing his bureaucratic protection within the American intelligence community and might eventually be able to play one agency off against another.

One major question, of course, is why the KGB went to all this trouble, since Shadrin was never privy to the most classified material. But according to sources who tracked him, it was enough that he mingled with high Pentagon officers and perhaps picked up bits of information. Shadrin's prominent friends included Admiral Rufus L. Taylor, the director of naval intelligence.

In addition, these sources emphasize, the KGB is a bureaucracy whose bosses regard it as quite an achievement to penetrate one of their men deep into the enemy camp, even if he produces little of value.

In his purported pose as double agent, Shadrin went through the motions of encountering his KGB counterparts in Washington and in such cities abroad as Montreal and Vienna. The guess is that, after almost a decade of shadowy maneuvers, he decided to return home—or “come in from the cold,” as spies would put it.

Interestingly enough, it was he rather than the CIA or FBI who proposed to meet the KGB in Vienna in late 1975—the rendezvous from which he vanished. Vienna is only a short drive from the Czechoslovak frontier, and hardly the spot he would have selected had he considered himself in danger of a KGB kidnaping.

The Shadrin mystery has inspired other interpretations, including the official Kremlin theory that he was murdered by the CIA as he attempted to go back to the Soviet Union. In the view of some experts, the Russians made the extraordinary move of publishing their account in order to obfuscate the case.

It is impossible, as I have said, to document the version that Shadrin was secretly representing the KGB. It is equally impossible, however, to verify the tale that he was snatched away by Soviet agents.

Plainly, though, the CIA bungled -- either by failing to check out his *bona fides* thoroughly or by failing to prevent his abduction. But then, it hasn't been the first time that the CIA has bungled.